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Senate Republicans Welcome Governor's Interest in Wellness Initiatives

Legislation already underway to do what governor's council is promoting

Lansing - Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema and Sen. Tom George today welcomed the governor's interest in joining their efforts to keep health insurance costs down by promoting healthier lifestyles.

"Senate Republicans have been promoting health and wellness in Michigan for a long time. I see a new report says the governor's council has come to the same conclusion we have: health insurance rates and healthcare costs are tied to healthier living," said George, R-Texas Township. "It's great to see them agree with Senate Republicans that our insurance premiums keep rising and our unhealthy lifestyles play a major role."

George introduced legislation in the fall, co-sponsored by all Senate Republicans, which will require insurers, HMOs and nonprofit health care corporations to offer wellness coverage and provide premium rebates for participation. Currently, health insurance companies, unlike life, home or auto insurance carriers, are forbidden by state law from offering incentives for good behavior.

"Last year, the governor killed our efforts in the budget to reduce Medicaid costs through healthier lifestyle initiatives, but at least now there's a chance we'll see this legislation signed," said Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "Healthcare costs are eating up the state budget and negatively impacting our economy in many ways. We must make Michigan physically healthier if we hope to make Michigan economically healthier."

Senate Bills 848 and 849 are part of a series of wellness initiatives Senate Republicans have spearheaded. Other bills would provide pocketbook incentives for Medicaid recipients who make healthy choices and require physical education in elementary schools.

"Senate leadership has been supportive of my efforts but there's always been a question mark in front of the governor's stand on this issue," George said. "It's great news to see the governor's administration endorsing our efforts to make Michigan healthier. We look forward to seeing these bills signed into law as soon as they reach her desk."

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